WORLD AIDS DAY NEWSLETTER

No. 1 – July 1991

World AIDS Day 1991 – Sharing the Challenge

HIV: A dangerously divisive virus

"We all need to join forces and share the challenge", said Dr Hiroshi Nakajima, Director-General of WHO, in announcing this year's theme for World AIDS Day. "We need to commit time, resources and effort in a way that draws on the strengths of each of us for maximum collective impact. Only partnership gives us a chance of prevailing against the AIDS pandemic."

Soon after Susie, a 24-year old Ugandan woman, gave birth to her fourth child, it was discovered that the recurrent bouts of sickness she had suffered throughout pregnancy were caused by AIDS. "When I found I was HIV-positive I didn't know what to do", she said. "My neighbour got AIDS and she tried to kill herself and her children. I too felt like taking poison."

Her husband walked out on Susie, her co-wife and their five children when he learned that both women had AIDS. Now Susie fears that the people they share a house with will throw them all out if they discover the family's secret.

Bill and Elizabeth from Australia, too, felt terribly alone with their secret when Bill was found to be HIV-positive following a blood transfusion. "We were given no help, no support, no counselling", Elizabeth wrote of their experience. "We were later to find out that there were other known HIV-infected persons in the city, one of them an old school friend of mine. But someone made the decision not to put us in touch; someone had the audacity to decide that our assumed differences in sexual orientation were greater than that shattering thing we had in common."

Loneliness and fear of prejudice and rejection are common themes running through all the testimonies of people with HIV infection or AIDS, and of those close to them. Indeed these psychological aspects are as much a part of the AIDS pandemic as are the physical manifestations of disease. Just as infections such as pneumocystis pneumonia and tuberculosis are opportunistic, taking advantage of people weakened by the virus, so prejudice and the apportioning of blame are also opportunistic, taking advantage of communities weakened by fear of the unknown.

The psychological impact of AIDS is causing rumblings and cracks to appear along the ancient faultlines in society, drawing attention to long-standing inequalities between races, sexes, social classes and countries of the world. Thus prostitutes in several countries have been singled out as a public health risk and they — but not their clients — have been imprisoned. Thus, too, many Haitian shop-keepers in the USA were driven out of business and their children out of local schools when, early in the epidemic, AIDS researchers labelled Haitians a "high-risk group". And thus some insensitive researchers from the West continue to make flying visits to areas of Africa badly hit by AIDS to gather material for their own purposes without sharing their expertise or results. They have been dubbed the "safari" or "helicopter" researchers.

The history of epidemics shows that the instinct to apportion blame and to try to isolate those believed to be responsible is a common human response to overwhelming threat. But whereas isolation and quarantine have been appropriate responses to past epidemics such as smallpox, plague and influenza which

What is World AIDS Day?

World AIDS Day is an annual day of observance designed to expand and strengthen the worldwide effort to stop AIDS. Its goal is to open channels of communication, promote the exchange of information and experience, and forge a spirit of social tolerance.

World AIDS Day provides an opportunity for talking about HIV infection and AIDS, caring for people with HIV infection and AIDS, and learning about AIDS. The only international day of coordinated action against AIDS, it is now a yearly event in most countries.

By highlighting AIDS prevention and care activities already under way and stimulating new ones, World AIDS Day helps build a lasting worldwide effort to stop AIDS.

were contagious through casual contact, they are inappropriate — and indeed dangerous — in the case of AIDS which is spread not through ordinary social contact, but by deliberate human behaviour, especially sexual intercourse.

Quite apart from violating the human rights of the stigmatized individuals, any attempt to isolate those with HIV infection or AIDS breeds complacency and a false sense of invulnerability in those outside the stigmatized group, who then fail to make necessary changes to their behaviour. Keith, a school teacher from Rakai District, the area in Uganda first affected by AIDS, told how he and his wife paid a bitter price for taking such an attitude: "I heard of people suffering for several months with diarrhoea", said Keith. "But I thought: 'this is witchcraft. It won't affect us. It has come with the smugglers from Tanzania. They have been bewitched for not paying their debts'." Keith and his wife both now have AIDS.

Discrimination against people with HIV infection or AIDS encourages defensiveness and secrecy in those who are, or suspect they might be, infected, making them afraid of contact with the health and social services. And it drives underground those with personal experience of HIV/AIDS, thus silencing the pandemic's most powerful, credible and sensitive spokespersons who could otherwise be invaluable allies in the fight against AIDS.

"Seeing or meeting a PWA (person with AIDS) humanizes the whole situation", says Richard Rector, himself a PWA and health educator living in Denmark. "That PWA could be your son, your brother, your sister or your friend. It makes it harder to argue that 'AIDS victims' and seropositive people should be locked up somewhere out of sight."

Because of the still-strong tendency to discriminate, many people remain blind to the fact that AIDS threatens us all; that as it picks away relentlessly at the fabric of society, no one will be spared its effects, even if they and their loved ones are never directly affected by the disease. It is to bring home this truth, and to encourage wider participation as well as greater cooperation in the fight against AIDS, that WHO has chosen the theme "Sharing the challenge" for World AIDS Day 1991.

"For anyone who may doubt the need for true partnerships in our fight against AIDS", said Dr Michael Merson, Director of WHO's Global Programme on AIDS, "I challenge them to look at how the pandemic continues to spread rapidly to new areas."

In little more than a decade, HIV has infected at least 8 to 10 million people worldwide, of whom over 1.5 million — including more than 500 000 children below the age of 5 years — have developed AIDS. The pandemic is currently growing at the rate of around 5000 new infections per day. WHO's projection of the number of men, women and children expected to be infected with HIV by the year 2000 is 30-40 million, with a cumulative total of 10-15 million AIDS cases. Most, if not all, those infected with the

A breakdown in communication

There is disturbing evidence that after nearly a decade of public information, messages are not getting through, and that huge numbers of people remain confused or ignorant of the facts about HIV/AIDS. In the USA for example, the world's largest health information telephone service, National AIDS Hotline, receives some 3000 calls a day from members of the public wondering whether they can catch AIDS through shaking hands, from toilet seats, from being served popcorn or ice-cream by an HIV-infected person, or by any one of a huge variety of casual encounters with the virus.

A recent report from the federal government's National Center for Health Statistics — which has, since 1987, been conducting an ongoing survey among 100 000 United States adults on their knowledge about HIV/AIDS — revealed that high percentages of adults knew of the three main modes of HIV transmission, but many were less sure about activities that held no danger. Thus 87% were certain of the fact that HIV can be transmitted through sexual contact, 95% knew about the risk involved in needle-sharing between injecting drug users, and 85% knew that the virus can be passed from an infected pregnant woman to her baby. Sadly, however, only 55% were certain that eating in a restaurant where the cook was HIV-positive posed no threat; 53% were unsure whether the virus could be transmitted through a cough or a sneeze, and 57% had misgivings about mosquitos and other insects as possible vectors of the virus.

This state of affairs may reflect ordinary communication problems. For example, it is possible that people are receiving conflicting messages from the many different sources of information; that they are rejecting even truthful information because they do not trust the source; or that information is, quite simply, poorly packaged. Besides, the idea of risk is one of the most difficult concepts in health education.

Whatever the reasons for failure, the lessons are clear: the degree of ignorance and misunderstanding of the facts concerning HIV/AIDS should never be underestimated. There can be no relaxation in the effort to educate and inform.

READEX FICHE

virus are expected ultimately to develop AIDS.

Among them will be men and women of all races, ages and social backgrounds. A huge proportion will be young and middle-aged adults whose deaths will rob society of many of its most productive members — its teachers, factory workers, farmers, builders, doctors and nurses, and even its political leaders.

Already, in areas badly hit by the pandemic, productive activity comes to a standstill every few days as communities mourn and bury their dead. Satellite pictures show evidence of farmland returning to bush and homes abandoned in some African villages where the population has been decimated. And in Zambia, copper mining, which is the mainstay of the economy, is threatened with collapse as AIDS cuts into the workforce.

During the 1990s, WHO estimates that 10-15 million children worldwide will be orphaned by maternal AIDS. Their pressing needs for shelter, food, education, health care and nurture threaten to overwhelm all existing support systems, including the extended family which traditionally shoulders the burden of orphaned children in many societies. Besides the fact that some of these children are already being abandoned by relatives with groundless fears about contamination, the extended family itself may well be a casualty of the pandemic as uncles, aunts and in some societies co-wives also succumb to AIDS.

Meeting the economic and social challenges of AIDS will depend to a huge extent on personal commitment and imagination, for everywhere money to tackle problems is bound to be woefully inadequate. The poorest countries are bearing the brunt of the pandemic. Nearly two-thirds of reported AIDS cases and three-quarters of HIV-infected people come from developing countries, and these proportions are expected to rise even further. Yet the total budget of national AIDS programmes in many such countries is less than the cost of caring for a handful of people with AIDS in the USA.

Many groups and individuals working in the AIDS field have already recognized the value of shared effort and have formed fruitful alliances. WHO, which leads the global effort against AIDS, works in partnership not only with ministries of health, but with bilateral and nongovernmental organizations, and, increasingly, with other international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the United Nations Population Fund.

There are limitless possibilities for partnerships, but the following are some key areas in which beneficial alliances might be made:

- Between people with HIV infection or AIDS (PWAs) and those who are not

What do people do on World AIDS Day?

Each year the messages of World AIDS Day reach an ever wider audience as the number of people participating and the variety of activities they organize increase. An enormous amount of effort, imagination and creativity is put into organizing events, as a brief glance at the archives shows...

■ On World AIDS Day 1990 the streets of Sydney, Australia, were packed with people out to see the special stalls and displays erected for the occasion; free earrings, key-rings, postcards and diaries bearing the Day's logo were handed out; and 80 celebrities served in shops and restaurants as part of Sydney's COUNTERAIDS project to raise funds for the AIDS campaign. In Canberra, television personalities met sports personalities in a public square to play a word game on safer sex using giant dice on a giant chessboard. In Melbourne, staff from a hospital AIDS unit visited local discos to distribute condoms and educational material.

■ In Zambia a local musician wrote a special song for World AIDS Day 1990 that was played regularly on the radio during the last weeks of November. Condoms and information were distributed in clinics and marketplaces; women competed in a walking marathon; and there were drama performances and a nationwide picture competition on the subject of AIDS.

■ For the past two years a group of artists from New York City has organized "A Day Without Art" on World AIDS Day. The idea is to commemorate the many lives lost to AIDS in the United States creative community while increasing awareness of HIV/AIDS and stimulating discussion on the role artists might play in fighting the pandemic. Last year over 1000 art institutions nationwide — including galleries, museums, theatres and colleges — took part in a huge variety of activities. Among other things, they cancelled performances, dimmed lights, and shrouded or removed exhibits. Two major art galleries replaced world-famous Picasso paintings with information about AIDS. The underlying message of the Day Without Art is that there can be no "business as usual" until the AIDS crisis is resolved. "We must count and mourn our losses, learn from them, and call with rage and love for action", said Philip Yenawine, one of the organizers. His words sum up the spirit and purpose of World AIDS Day everywhere.

infected. "PWAs have crossed a certain fear threshold", explains Richard Rector. "They already have the disease that scares everyone half to death. They've had to learn to live with the fear and many have transcended it. We can help others to learn to overcome the fear which blinds them to the realities of AIDS."

- Between peers. Trusting the "messenger" is essential to accepting the message, and one's peers are particularly credible messengers. Besides, they share common concerns and special interests. Existing peer groups among, for example, young people, women, prostitutes, seropositive people, carers. All identify the strength that comes from mutual support and a louder voice in the public arena as major benefits.

- National AIDS programmes, and the many community-based organizations which have made such a tremendous contribution already, constitute two of the most important groups fighting the epidemic within countries. Often mutual suspicion, stifling bureaucracy and lack of funds present formidable obstacles to cooperation between the two. However, their activities and areas of expertise are complementary, and wherever partnerships have been established they have proved immensely beneficial. In the most effective examples of collaboration, the two are partners at all levels, including planning and policy-making.

- As the problem of orphans demonstrates, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is as much a social and economic matter as a health one; it therefore demands a response from many different government departments besides health. Meeting their needs alone will involve, among others, housing, social services, and education departments, who can make the most of their joint efforts and avoid unnecessary duplication through team work. The industrial and agricultural sectors, too, face a formidable challenge as the pandemic decimates the workforce and sows fear and prejudice among survivors.

- Between men and women. Perhaps the most obvious area for partnership, this is also the most difficult since inequalities are widespread and often deep-rooted. However, there are inspiring examples of men and women who, recognizing that HIV threatens both partners in a sexual relationship, have seen the mutual self-interest in sharing responsibility for their sexual behaviour. These include a group of young people in Botswana who, emboldened by the AIDS threat, have overcome taboos surrounding sexual matters to discuss traditional roles, personal concerns, and behaviour appropriate to the AIDS era.

In drawing attention this World AIDS Day to the common threat and the need for partnership, WHO is not simply making a plea for compassion and a humanitarian response to the AIDS pandemic. It is appealing, too, for people to recognize the dangers attendant upon prejudice and discrimination. Perhaps the only good news about the pandemic is that, as far as the social response is concerned, what is best for the person with HIV or AIDS is also best for society at large.

World AIDS Day
GPA
World Health Organization
1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland

❑ **I am not on your mailing list. Please add my name:**

Name

Name of Organization

Address

❑ **I am on the mailing list, and will participate in World AIDS Day. The following events are planned:**

Planning an event for World AIDS Day: an action check-list

Once the decision is made to organize a World AIDS Day event, it is time to turn ideas into action. After identifying needs and goals, clarifying objectives and developing strategies for realizing those goals, make an Action Plan using this 10-point check-list.

1. Form a planning committee.
2. Brainstorm over ideas.
3. Identify events.
4. Identify resources needed.
5. Identify logistical needs.
6. Make an Action Plan timetable.
7. Delegate responsibility for work.
8. Schedule regular follow-up meetings and progress reviews.
9. Identify local leaders and celebrities who can lend vital support.
10. Contact the media and organize publicity.

This newsletter can also be reproduced with the name of your organization and distributed to widen your World AIDS Day network.

The World Health Organization has chosen two colours for the World AIDS Day logo. Organizers and planners may choose to use these suggested colours, select their own, or reproduce the logo in black and white. (Note to printers: Colours for the World AIDS Day symbol are PMS 527 (purple) for the lettering "World AIDS Day" and the leaves around the globe, and PMS 334 (green) for the water areas of the globe and the lettering "1 December".)

World AIDS Day 1991 will:

- Continue to increase awareness about HIV/AIDS.
- Strengthen the worldwide effort to meet the challenge of AIDS by showing how it can be shared.
- Help reinforce AIDS prevention activities at all levels.
- Promote support and care for all HIV-infected persons and people with AIDS, their families and friends, and help combat discrimination and isolation.

Working with the media

The media play an important role in helping you reach the widest possible audience for your World AIDS Day activities. Here is a check-list for working with the media:

1. *Designate a World AIDS Day media coordinator*
Find someone who "knows" the media, or who can talk to the media about your event.

2. *Develop a media plan*
Identify the media that can best help you — print, radio or television. Prepare a press release about your event. Find out who deals with stories of this nature and address the press release to him or her personally. Follow up with contacts with the media and offer interviews, visits, photo opportunities.

3. *Create a "media event"*
Wherever possible, make sure that your World AIDS Day event is topical and relevant so as to stimulate media coverage. Link events to local issues, issue clear policy statements or reports, or hold a news conference.

4. *Plan early*
Make sure the media know what they can cover on World AIDS Day. Send out your press release ahead of World AIDS Day notifying media of the event, so that reporters can plan for the day.

5. *Be accessible, accurate and informative*
Make yourself accessible to the media. Offer help in arranging interviews, pictures and video taping. Explain the reason for World AIDS Day. Tell the media that you are part of a global picture, the biggest annual day of action against AIDS.

Some Ideas for World AIDS Day Activities

The types of events that can be organized for World AIDS Day and the scope for originality and imagination are unlimited. From official ceremonies and formal conferences to informal meetings, drama, dance and music, there are endless possibilities for activities that can help sensitize, inform and involve people.

Given the theme of World AIDS Day 1991, "Sharing the Challenge", try to identify other groups working on AIDS and link up with them for World AIDS Day activities. Take this opportunity to share ideas with them. And reach out to involve individuals or groups who are not yet active. World AIDS Day can be a good "excuse" for getting everyone involved in the fight against AIDS. Events which foster partnerships and a sense of community-wide involvement in AIDS activities will be especially appropriate.

Here are some ideas for World AIDS Day 1991. Some are inspired by successful events from previous years; others have been suggested since. These ideas have been collected from around the world and may require adaptation in different cultural settings. They are meant to stimulate your imagination, initiative and action on World AIDS Day and beyond.

- Talking about AIDS with your family, friends and neighbours
- Public meetings on AIDS issues
- Scientific meetings
- Information workshops about AIDS
- Seminars on ethical issues regarding AIDS
- Distributing "10 Points on AIDS" or other AIDS posters
- Special school events for World AIDS Day
- AIDS discussions in other places where young people meet
- Distributing World AIDS Day newsletters
- Programmes in the workplace or at trade union meetings
- Official statements by government and community leaders
- Information booths in the marketplace or shopping area
- Messages from entertainers
- University or college lectures
- Events sponsored by religious congregations or held at places of worship
- Religious leaders talking about AIDS
- Pharmacies giving away free condoms for a day
- Helping parents talk to their children about AIDS
- AIDS presentations for the deaf and hearing-impaired
- Information seminars in health care centres
- Discussions on AIDS in family planning clinics
- Seminars on AIDS and discrimination
- Organizing opportunities for people who want to help persons with AIDS (see "Showing you care)

Media and public information

- Special features for the media
- Paying to get an AIDS message published in the newspaper
- World AIDS Day news conferences
- Radio programmes
- Media workshops for journalists
- Reports on local AIDS services
- Getting World AIDS Day mentioned on radio or television shows
- Promoting coverage of World AIDS Day events by all media
- Press releases
- Letters to the Editor in journals and magazines
- Round-table discussions
- Special publications
- New book releases
- Special issue of newsletters
- Films and videos
- Special articles in popular magazines

Special events and competitions

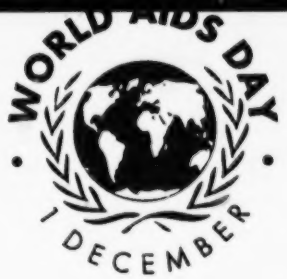
- Public sporting events
- Endorsements from sports stars
- Marathon walks and runs
- Street theatre
- Bicycle rallies
- Photo competitions
- Poster competitions
- Essay competitions
- Musicals, operas
- Benefit performances
- Dances
- Events in truck stops and markets
- Fund-raising events
- Events in bars and clubs
- Music videos

Exhibitions and publicity

- Art exhibits
- Banners
- Leaflets
- World AIDS Day T-shirts, stickers and badges
- Public service announcements
- Fact sheets on AIDS
- Poster and photo exhibits
- Information kits for schools, clubs, scouting groups
- Public advertisements
- Mobile AIDS information exhibits
- Calendars
- Special stamp issues
- Stamp cancellations
- Hot air balloons
- Displays on public transport
- Library displays

Showing you care

- Statements of solidarity
- Candlelight ceremonies and marches
- Working with AIDS service organizations
- Offering to do errands, chores and shopping for someone with AIDS
- Supporting community activities
- Visiting people with AIDS in hospitals
- Preparing or delivering meals to someone with AIDS
- Moments of silence for those who have died
- Offering to help with housecleaning for someone with AIDS
- Memorial services in places of worship
- Donating children's clothing and books to places caring for children affected by the AIDS pandemic
- Reading to children with AIDS in paediatric wards
- Endorsements from celebrities
- Distributing information on condoms
- Discussions on AIDS and the status of women
- Establishing AIDS information centres
- Establishing support groups
- Involving women's organizations in World AIDS Day activities
- Workshops for birth attendants and family planning counsellors
- Learning about sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS
- Organizing care for children of people with AIDS
- Making World AIDS Day an annual event
- Joining the Worldwide Effort...



Ten Points on AIDS for World AIDS Day

1. AIDS is a worldwide problem.

The AIDS pandemic has left no continent untouched. As of mid-1991, WHO estimates that 8-10 million men, women and children worldwide have been infected with HIV and that over 1.5 million of them have gone on to develop AIDS. Every day, around 5000 people are newly infected with HIV.

2. HIV and AIDS.

AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) is the end-stage of infection with the human immunodeficiency virus, HIV. In adults, AIDS takes an average of 10 years to develop. A person infected with HIV may thus look and feel healthy for many years, but he or she can still transmit the virus to someone else. We know that HIV is transmitted in only three ways:

- through unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected partner
- through infected blood or blood products
- from an infected mother to her baby before, during or shortly after birth (perinatal transmission).

3. Sexual transmission of HIV can be prevented.

Sexual transmission of HIV can occur from man to woman, from woman to man, and from man to man. The most effective way to prevent transmission of the virus in this way is to abstain from sexual intercourse or for two uninfected partners to remain faithful to one another. Otherwise the risk of spreading HIV through sexual intercourse can be significantly reduced by the proper use of condoms.

4. Infection through blood can be stopped.

Blood for transfusion can be tested for HIV infection and discarded if contaminated. Needles, syringes and other skin-piercing instruments should be sterilized or discarded after each use and should never be shared.

5. It is important to know how HIV is NOT transmitted.

HIV is a virus which does not survive easily outside the body. It is NOT spread by casual contact at work or school, by shaking hands, touching or hugging. It is NOT spread through food or water, by sharing cups or glasses, by coughing or sneezing, in swimming pools or on toilets. It is NOT spread by mosquitos or other insects. This means there is no danger of becoming infected through ordinary social contact.

6. Isolating people with HIV or AIDS is not the answer.

Besides being a violation of their human rights, discrimination against people with HIV or AIDS — or those thought to be at risk of infection — also endangers public health:

- it gives people outside the stigmatized group a sense that the threat of infection, and thus the need for personal precautions, has been removed;
- it drives the AIDS problem underground, making all efforts at prevention and care much more difficult.

7. Information and education are vital.

Until medical research finds a cure for AIDS or a vaccine to prevent infection, we must rely on changes in personal behaviour to prevent the spread of HIV. Information and education are therefore vital in the fight against AIDS.

8. AIDS threatens us all.

AIDS recognizes no boundaries of race, sex, class or age. No one is immune. And no one will remain untouched in the years to come as AIDS threatens entire communities and changes the patterns of daily life for everyone.

9. Sharing the challenge.

Because AIDS is a global problem it can only be stopped in one country if it is stopped in all countries. Working together — pooling our efforts, resources and imagination — gives us the best chance of bringing the pandemic under control.

10. What can YOU do?

You can contribute to stopping AIDS by making sure that you understand the facts about AIDS and helping others to do the same. World AIDS Day is a special opportunity every year to focus attention on this urgent problem that affects us all, and to join forces to meet the challenge. It is marked around the world by thousands of different events designed to increase awareness, and to express solidarity and compassion. This World AIDS Day — and every day — you can join the worldwide effort to stop AIDS.

1 DECEMBER
WORLD AIDS DAY 1991
"SHARING THE CHALLENGE"

World AIDS Day logo